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GREENE COUNTY: BORN 100 YEARS AGO.

BY CHARLES BRADSHAW

Illinois is a domain comprising 102 counties. Each of these counties has within its borders towns, villages and communities, and these in turn are made up of homes—the homes of the people, the seven or eight million people who really constitute the State of Illinois.

We think of a wheel as revolving around its center, and forget that the friction or the motive power that causes it to move forward is applied to its outer rim, its circumference.

Historians sometimes forget that this principle of mechanics applies also to history.

The history of Illinois, as of all states and nations, has had its beginnings, not at Kaskaskia, and Vandalia, and Springfield, but back in the homes—the pioneer homes and the modern homes—out on the rim of the wheel that moves the chariot of state ever forward. Whatsoever of stamina and rugged character have been stamped into our customs and into our laws was first developed in and around the log cabins that once stood in loneliness at the edge of forest clearings or out on the broad expanse of unfenced prairie.

The early history of Illinois is a composite photograph of life in these scattered communities and isolated cabins that made the pioneer counties of the State. There were fifteen of these counties in 1818, when Illinois became a State. Four more came into existence the following year, and at the session of the General Assembly during January and February, 1821, there was increased activity in this line, and seven new counties were formed. The centennial anniversary of these counties occurs next winter. The seven counties in the order in which they were formed, are Lawrence, Greene, Sangamon, Pike, Hamilton, Montgomery and Fayette.

This paper is to deal with the early history of one of the seven—Greene county.

During the spring of the year 1820, several house and barn raisings took place between Apple and Macoupin creeks, a region that, two years before, had been the uttermost frontier of civilization in the then newly-born State of Illinois. During the summer of that same year there was an occasional "hoss race" within that same territory. In the fall there were husking bees and hunting frolics. These house and barn raisings, these horse races, these husking bees and hunting parties provided the only means by which the pioneers of that region could exercise their natural bent as social beings. It was 35 or 40 miles to Edwardsville, the nearest town and their county seat. Not a church nor a school house between the Apple and the Macoupin, nor for many miles in either direction beyond those streams.

Hence the typical social gatherings of a pioneer settlement—the house raisings and husking bees—were well attended functions. Always there was one topic for talk wherever a few of these hardy pioneers foregathered. It was of the growth and future development of their sparse settlement into a political unit of the sovereign State of Illinois, with a capital of its own—a county, with a county seat located somewhere between Apple and Macoupin creeks.

The spring and summer of 1820 brought many accessions to the scattered settlements of that region, and the rapid growth gave weight to the agitation for forming a new county. The second General Assembly of the State of Illinois assembled at Vandalia, December 4, 1820. The future county, of course, had no representation in that body, and whether it sent any lobbyists over the bridle paths to the new state capital or not, can only be conjectured. Probably that was unnecessary. At any rate, a bill to create the new county was introduced early in the session, was passed January 18, and approved January 20, 1821.

The act creating the county bestowed upon it the name "Greene," in honor of Gen. Nathaniel Greene of Revolutionary fame. The boundaries, as then defined, included all of the present counties of Greene and Jersey, and to this territory was added that of the present counties of Macoupin,

Morgan and Scott. Thus the county became "Mother Greene" to a bevy of buxom daughters. Miss Morgan was first to set up housekeeping for herself in 1823; Macoupin followed in 1829, and Miss Jersey became a matron in 1839. Little Miss Scott remained in the Morgan household until '39 and then followed the example of her sisters.

The forming of Greene county brought on a contest for the location of the county capital. The contest was short, sharp and decisive. On February 20, 1821—just a month after the county was created by enactment—the five commissioners who had been named in the act met at a lone cabin on the prairie and proceeded to consider the eligible sites.

There were several of these. One was a beautiful mound about three miles southwest of the present town of Carrollton. Fifty years afterward a somewhat florid description was written by a man who remembered it as it then was, untouched by the hand of man, and he declared that "the sun in all his wanderings had seldom shone upon a lovelier spot of earth since the day on which the flaming sword was placed at the gates of Eden." The owner of that spot, Thos. Hobson, confident that no other proposed site could compete with his, had laid out a town on that mound and had named it Mt. Pleasant.

But Hobson was an Englishman who had come out from his native country only a short time before. The War of 1812 had ended, but it left more or less bitterness rankling in the breasts of these pioneers whose lives and homes had been menaced by the Indian allies of the British. This probably had something to do with the result of that contest. But perhaps a greater factor in it was the personality and popularity of the man who won.

The official report of the commissioners, as it appears in the records of the county, states that—"after examining the most eligible situation in said county, giving due weight and attention to the considerations set forth as to present and future population, etc." they had concluded that the most

suitable place for said seat of justice was a point 88 poles south of the northeast corner of section 22, township 10 north, range 12 west of the Third principal meridian.

The land thus described and selected was owned by one of the commissioners, but it is said that he refused to vote on fixing the site. The other four were unanimous. The man who did not vote and whose land became the site of Greene county's capital, was Thomas Carlin, afterward sixth governor of Illinois.

Local historians have been content to add that, after the decision had been made, one of the commissioners paced fifty yards to the west and said, "Here let the court house be built"; that the town was immediately laid out and named Carrollton.

Many have since wondered why the town was not named in honor of its founder, and why, a few years later, the county seat of Macoupin was apparently so named. Several years ago a descendant of Governor Carlin—a man who had never been in the west—came out to visit the scene of his grandfather's pioneering. Quite logically he steered his course to Carlinville, and was puzzled to find there no trace of ancestral records. I do not know why Carlinville was so named; why Carrollton was not is partly at least a matter of tradition only.

We can imagine those four other commissioners suggesting that the town be named for Mr. Carlin, and we can imagine him declining the honor with the modesty of real greatness. "Suggest a name, then," they no doubt said to him. And it is fairly well established that he did suggest the name. Himself a pioneer, he greatly admired those earlier pioneers who laid the foundations of a nation in the Declaration of Independence, and he especially loved the name of that signer of the document who, in order that no British high executioner would be put to the trouble of inquiring, wrote down his name—"Charles Carroll of Carrollton."

And so he gave to the town a name, beautiful in itself, honored in history, and significant of courage and fidelity to principle.

Perhaps it would be well at this point to pause a bit in the story itself, and introduce the cast of characters in this little drama, "The Birth"—not of a Nation—but "of a County."

Enter first a man on horseback, broad-shouldered, rough and rugged, a rifle slung across the pommel of his saddle, a hand shading his eyes, which gaze across an expanse of prairie that ends at the horizon. What Canada's famous mounted police have been to the lonely vastness of British Columbia and Hudson's Bay country, the Rangers were to Illinois one hundred years and more ago. When the Federal government was unable to send troops to protect the settlers in Illinois from Indian atrocities, encouraged by the British during the War of 1812, the settlers themselves organized as Rangers. One of the camps was at Edwardsville, and was in command of Capt. Judy.

"For several years," says Clement L. Clapp in his history of Greene County, "these brave, determined men rode over the bare and silent prairies for hundreds of miles, now chasing a band of fleeing savages, now hurrying to the defense of a threatened settlement. They were almost constantly in the saddle, rarely slept under a roof, were independent of civilization for food or comforts, and exercised almost superhuman vigilance in keeping the red men at bay. They were familiar with every feature of Indian warfare and their deeds of daring and endurance have been made the theme of many a thrilling poem or romantic tale.

In these expeditions against the Indians the Rangers became probably the first white men to pass over the territory that is now Greene county. They saw what splendid opportunities it offered for settlement—or would offer when the Indians were finally driven out. To a pioneer, the ideal spot for staking his claim was one that afforded, first of all, good water; second, timber for building his cabin, and third a situation at the edge of a prairie, to avoid unnecessary clearing for putting in crops. Proceeding northward from the Wood river settlement, the hardy adventurers found no such combination until they reached Macoupin creek. No less than a dozen or fifteen of these Rangers from Fort Russell came to,

or crossed, the Macoupin to build their cabins on the very frontier of civilization.

Three men stand out conspicuously in this band. They were Samuel Thomas, Thomas Carlin and Thomas Rattan.

Samuel Thomas was the grandfather of Congressman H. T. Rainey, who now represents the Twentieth congressional district at Washington. Born in South Carolina in 1794, he began a race with civilization when he was eight years old by going to Kentucky. In 1813, at the age of 19, he set out on horseback for Illinois. After he and his two companions crossed the Ohio river, they found that the settlers had deserted their cabins and fled from the Indians. They were not deterred from their purpose, however, and pushed on to Wood river. When they arrived there Mr. Thomas purchased a rifle on credit, in order to join the Rangers.

A few months later, while he was serving in Capt. Judy's company, the Wood river massacre occurred, and one of his sisters and her six children were slain by the Indians. In 1816 Mr. Thomas visited what is now Greene county, picked out the land on which he afterward settled, cut and stacked some hay and made other improvements. Then he returned to Wood river and the Indians burned his haystacks and destroyed his improvements. For two years more he remained at Wood river, and then in August, 1818, his desire to be on the extreme edge of things led him northward again. He was accompanied by Thomas Carlin and John W. Huitt, a brother-in-law of Carlin. When they reached Macoupin creek, Huitt was unwilling to put that barrier between himself and civilization, and he stopped on the south side, while the other two crossed the creek and went on. Three miles north of the creek Thomas arrived at the spot he had selected two years before. A beautiful grove and a clear spring of water had figured in his choice. It is recorded that—"Here Mr. Thomas killed a deer, cut a bee tree and engraved his name on the bark of a monarch of the forest, to indicate that the land was claimed." Then he built a cabin, and returned for his wife and household goods. With these loaded on an ox cart, he

arrived at his new home November 9, 1818, and thus became the first settler in Greene county north of the Macoupin.

Thomas Carlin was born near Shelbyville, Kentucky, in 1786. From earliest boyhood, he had a natural love of adventure and was trained to endure the hardships of backwoods life. In the vanguard of pioneering, he went first to Missouri, then to Illinois, coming here in time to serve through the War of 1812 in the Rangers. After the war he operated a ferry across the Mississippi some miles above St. Louis, and while there he married Miss Rebecca Huitt. As previously stated, he came to Greene county with Samuel Thomas in August, 1818, and when the latter paused to shoot a deer and cut a bee tree at the spot where he was to build his cabin, Carlin proceeded about three miles farther to the northeast. It may be remarked here that those big, outdoor men of early days liked to have neighbors, but they didn't want to be too crowded to breathe. Late that fall or early in the spring of 1819, Carlin brought his wife, mother and stepfather to this spot and there built his cabin, the first dwelling place of white people within the present limits of Carrollton. The frame house he afterward built on that spot was torn down several years ago, and there is nothing now to mark the place.

Carlin is described as a man of medium height, not heavily built, but having a pair of powerful shoulders; a man of iron nerve and much natural shrewdness and skill in dealing with his fellowmen. His honesty and fair dealing was beyond question, and he knew no fear. While he was register of lands at Quincy, it is said he frequently drove over the lonely road between Quincy and Carrollton, conveying a wagon load of gold and silver—the proceeds of land sales—and that these trips were sometimes made at night and alone.

After Greene county was organized Carlin was elected its first sheriff. He was elected the first state senator from the district comprising Pike and Greene counties, in 1824, and served as senator in the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh General Assemblies. In 1838 he was elected sixth governor of Illinois, at one of the most trying and critical periods in the history of the State, and he acquitted himself with perhaps



STATUE OF GOV. CARLIN
(GREENE COUNTY)

as much credit and as little criticism as any man could have done in that crisis. After retiring from public life he returned to his home in Carrollton, and died there February 14, 1852. More than 100 years ago he built his cabin under a great spreading tree; and under another tree in our silent city of the dead, a few rods from the site of the cabin, beneath one of the plainest, least pretentious of marble shafts, now rests his mortal remains. Within our court house square, probably very near the spot where those five commissioners made their decision, now stands a monument surmounted by an imposing, full-length bronze statue of Governor Carlin, erected by the State of Illinois in recognition of his service, and dedicated by Governor Lowden on July 4, 1917.

Thomas Rattan, third in this trio of Rangers, also took active part in the beginning of things in Greene county. It may be remarked in passing, that Samuel Thomas, adventurous youth, settled down to become a prosperous farmer and the patriarch of a large and prominent family; that Carlin, also adventurous youth, became the successful politician. Rattan, possibly as much imbued with the spirit of adventure as the others, became the energetic builder and business man, and had time also to enter politics. The three were types of the men who made and developed, not only Greene, but every county of the State.

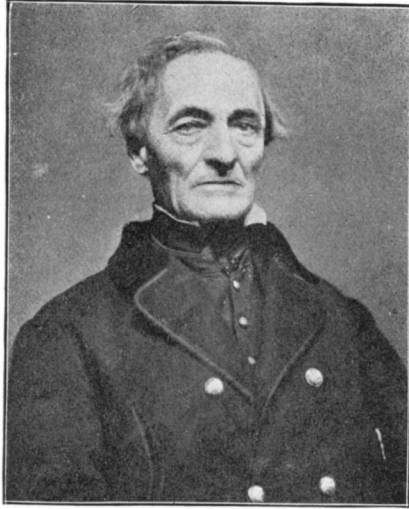
Rattan built and kept the first log cabin hotel in Carrollton; built the court house that stood on the square for sixty years; built and operated mills; bridged the Macoupin with one of those old-fashioned wooden, boxed-up structures, that remained even longer than the old court house. With all these activities and a bit of farming on the side, he was drawn into political life, and reached a seat in the General Assembly at Vandalia two years ahead of Carlin, being elected representative at the first general election in 1822. As the county and the people became more settled life became too monotonous here for Thomas Rattan, and he moved to the great southwest. In Texas he again became a pioneer, and died there in 1854. I find it stated in a Texas volume of biography that Rattan was a direct descendant of Gen. Nathaniel Greene,

for whom Greene county was named. Rattan's daughter, Annie Rattan, born in Carrollton in 1828, married James W. Throckmorton, one of the early governors of Texas.

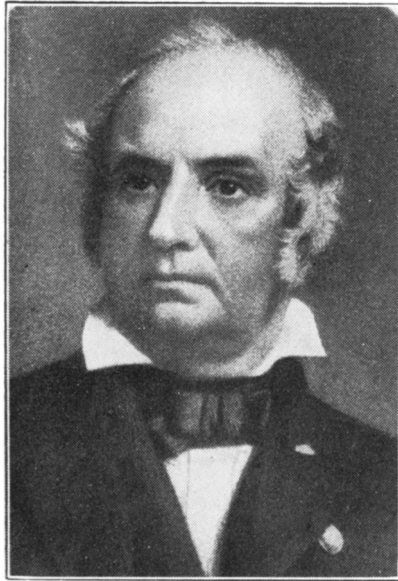
Gen. Jacob Fry, one of the early settlers, became a resident in 1821, accepted Thomas Carlin's offer of a free lot if he would build upon it, and began the first house in Carrollton—a frame house, mind you, for he cut the timber and split it into boards. But Rattan's log tavern has the credit of being the first building completed, for Fry stopped his own work to help Rattan. Fry was sheriff of the county for ten years, and near the close of that period officiated as executioner at the first public hanging in the county. Immediately after his unpleasant duty was performed, he mounted his horse and rode away to join the company he had raised for the Black Hawk war. In that war he became a colonel, and at its close was made major general of the State militia. In 1827 he was appointed one of the Illinois and Michigan canal commissioners, and in 1856, collector of customs at Chicago. In the Civil war he commanded a regiment that did valiant service at Shiloh.

The very last one of those earliest settlers passed over into a New Country some twenty-odd years ago. Rowell Hunnicutt was of a type different from the others I have described. A year or two before he died, Mary Hartwell Catherwood, author of "Old Kaskaskia," "The Romance of Dollard," etc., visited Greene county and met and talked with the old man. He came as a boy to help Samuel Thomas in crossing the Macoupin, and his father settled in the bluffs overlooking the Illinois river. To Mrs. Catherwood, in 1895, he said:

"Yes, I am a wild man myself yet. I wish I could go to a new country as this was in 1820. My father first moved his family into a cave in the bluff, near a spring. The time of the year was May. It was pretty living. We built our fire against the back of the cave, and the smoke rolled along the roof and went out at the cave door without any damage. This land was a paradise when I could stand on the bluff and look down in the river bottom and count fifty deer in sight. White



GEN. JACOB FRY
(GREENE COUNTY)



COL. E. D. BAKER
(GREENE COUNTY)

men hadn't spoiled the country and turned everything to dollars. Neighbors thought of what they could do for one another, not of how they might take advantage, and the Indians were always honest." "Uncle Rowell" Hunnicutt, at 83, longed to hunt up the Indian tribes he had lived with and near, back in the early '20s. Nothing would have pleased him better than to slip back 10,000 years and be a cave man again.

About 1825 or '26 there arrived in Carrollton a family, cultured but poverty-stricken, Baker by name. There were several boys, and one of them, a lad of perhaps 12 or 14 years, was destined to have his name writ large in the nation's history. Volumes have been printed about Edward Dickinson Baker, and the Illinois State Historical Society has listened to sketches of his life on more than one occasion, if I am not mistaken. It would be impossible for me to add to his fame or to pronounce a fitting eulogy at this time.

But Carrollton has not been given credit for its share in his early life, and there have been conflicting statements about his boyhood. Several writers have sent him from Belleville to St. Louis in his young manhood and set him to driving a dray there. It has been established by the testimony of old residents of Carrollton that he was a mere boy when the family came there, and that he attended school at a log school house near the town. The family lived in a small log house near the public square. Moses O. Bledsoe, then county clerk, afterward clerk of the supreme court, took an interest in the boy, loaned him books, assisted him with his studies and finally suggested that he study law. Young Baker entered the office of A. W. Cavarly, Carrollton's first attorney, and was admitted to practice law when he was about 19 years old. In 1831, when Baker was less than 21, he married the widow of Samuel Lee, the first county clerk and recorder. The home they occupied—built by Samuel Lee in 1829—still stands as a part of the Hodges office building on the north side of the public square.

The year following his marriage, Baker went to the Black Hawk war, and when it was over, he chose a novel and adventurous way of returning home—floating down the Missis-

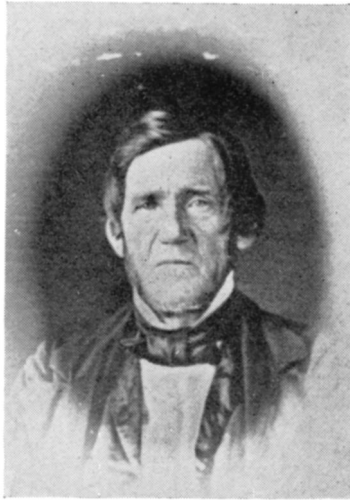
issippi 300 miles in a canoe, with an Indian for his only companion.

It is said that Baker's father was one of the thirty-three victims of the cholera epidemic in Carrollton in 1833. It has been repeatedly stated that his mother died before the family came to Illinois. A citizen of Carrollton, still living, has told me that he distinctly remembers Mrs. Baker, as well as the rest of the family.

The story often told of Baker's boyhood—of how he was once found in tears because he had discovered that, being of English birth, he could never be president of the United States, has been handed down in Carrollton as having actually occurred there. Possibly it never occurred at all.

You already know how he came to Springfield and outshone the brightest intellects at the State capital; how he went to the Pacific coast and made history there; how he went to the United States senate and met and put to shame the eloquence of the secessionists; and finally how he buckled on the sword to meet secession in the field of battle, and fell at Ball's Bluff.

While I am about the self-imposed and presumptuous task of correcting history, let me say that the credit for preventing bloodshed in the historic Lincoln-Shields duel belongs to a Carrollton pioneer, according to the recollection of old settlers. When James Shields challenged Abraham Lincoln in September, 1842, on account of the publication of some verses—which Lincoln did not write, but assumed responsibility for—it was agreed that the duel be fought on an island near Alton, broadswords to be the weapons. The local story is that Lincoln and his second, Merryman, riding in a rickety old buggy, behind a rather dilapidated horse, reached the village, on the way to Alton, the evening before the fateful day, and stopped for the night at a hotel. A detail of the story is that during the evening Lincoln took a broadsword, walked out to the edge of town, where a luxuriant patch of tall "jimpsons" were growing, and practiced sword exercise for a half hour or so, to the almost utter destruction of the "jimpson" patch.



JOHN RUSSELL
(GREENE COUNTY)

Lincoln had attended Greene county circuit court on several occasions, and had a few quite intimate friends in the town. One of these was R. W. English, who afterward moved to Springfield. English and one or two others, perhaps, followed Lincoln next morning to the "field of honor," and persuaded the combatants to call the affair off. None of Lincoln's biographers seem to have heard the Carrollton end of the story.

Any account of the pioneers who helped in the making of Greene county would be incomplete without some reference to John Russell, the sage of Bluffdale, whose home, remote from the haunts of men, was sought by savants and scientists, even from the Old World. Russell was born in Vermont in 1793, and came to Greene county in 1828. The old home he built under the Illinois bluffs still stands. He was a writer of note, an educator of wide experience, and became editor of the first Greene county newspaper, the *Backwoodsman*, which was started in 1838 at Grafton (then in Greene county) afterward published for a short time at Jerseyville, and moved to Carrollton in 1841, where Mr. Russell's son-in-law, A. S. Tilden, was its publisher. The publication came to an untimely end late in the latter year, when, after it had presumed to rejoice over President Tyler's veto of the Bank bill, somebody entered the office at night and dumped the forms and type upon the floor. Russell died at Bluffdale in 1863.

Brigadier General William P. Carlin was one of the distinguished native sons of Greene county. He was a nephew of Governor Carlin, and was born on a farm a few miles from Carrollton in 1829. In 1846 he was admitted to West Point Military Academy, on recommendation of Senator Stephen A. Douglas, graduated in 1850, gained much experience in Indian warfare and had become a captain before the beginning of the Civil war. He was appointed colonel of the Thirty-eighth volunteer infantry in the summer of 1861; for gallantry at the battle of Stone River was promoted to brigadier general, and in 1863, for his distinguished services at Chickamauga, Chattanooga and Atlanta, was brevetted major general. After the war he was in command at several forts on the western fron-

tier, and retired from the service in 1893. He then built a home in Carrollton, and died ten years later while returning from a western trip. His military funeral on October 11, 1903, with the governor, other state officials and an escort of militia in attendance, was an event in the more recent history of Carrollton. The late General John M. Palmer, upon whose staff General Carlin served in the Civil war, frequently referred to him as one of the bravest men he ever knew.

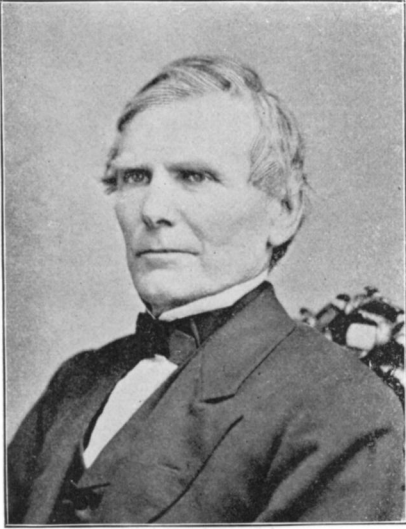
Others there were who came while Greene county was still young whose names should be mentioned in this paper. Charles Drury Hodges, a young lawyer from Annapolis, Maryland, stepped from the stage coach one bleak day in November, 1833, and his dapper appearance made quite a sensation in the quiet, homespun village. He hung out his "shingle" in Carrollton; a few years later became county judge; was elected to congress; served six years as circuit judge, and was treasurer of the Alton, Jacksonville & Chicago railroad, the first steamroad built through Greene county.

David Meade Woodson came also in the fall of 1833, from Kentucky, became the law partner of Judge Hodges, went to the legislature, was defeated for congress by Stephen A. Douglas, was a member of the constitutional convention of 1847, and served nearly twenty years on the circuit bench.

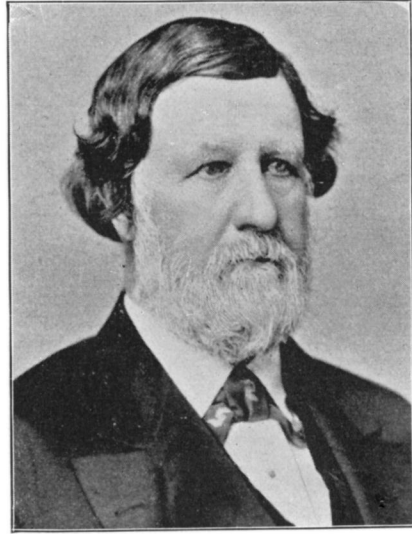
The name of Samuel Willard is familiar to the Illinois Historical Society. He came out from Boston in 1831, as a boy ten years old, and his father taught school in Carrollton. He lived in the town only during his boyhood, but with a boy's investigating turn of mind, he became familiar with the modes of living and the primitive ways of doing things that were in vogue in a pioneer community, and seventy-five years afterward—in 1906—he contributed to this society one of the most interesting papers it has ever listened to.

All through the preparation of this paper there has constantly come into my mind a bit of quotation from ancient history—from the Old Testament I believe it is—

"There were giants in those days."



D. M. WOODSON
(GREENE CO.)



C. D. HODGES
(GREENE CO.)



GOV. CARLIN'S OLD HOUSE
(GREENE CO.)

Those giants who carved Egyptian temples out of solid rock 3,000 or 4,000 years ago were not more remarkable in achievement than the giants of intellect, and character, and energy who carved counties, and states and a nation out of the virgin soil of a new continent.

Think of the changes that have been wrought in a century! Where Samuel Thomas drove his oxcart across the untracked prairie, farmers now drive their big touring cars along well kept roads. Within a mile or two of Rowell Hunicutt's cave dwelling are now elegant farm houses, equipped with all the modern improvements of lighting, heating, sanitation and luxury. Where Edward D. Baker trudged to a log school house are now being established community high schools with the best equipment and most efficient faculty that can be secured.

There were giants in those days. And miracles have been wrought in a century. But let us not forget the giants in contemplation and enjoyment of the miracles.